



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**CONSUMER &
BUSINESS AFFAIRS**

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December 1, 2015

Carlos Benavides, President
Los Angeles County Commission on Disabilities
500 West Temple Street, Room B-50
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear President Benavides:

Thank you for your letter requesting information related to my presentation at the Los Angeles County Commission on Disabilities. At your request, I have provided both a summary of my presentation to your Commission as well as a report back on the challenges disabled individuals face while refueling at gas stations.

Summary of Commission Presentation

By way of background as a public servant, I have worked in the consumer protection field for 23 years, at the state and local levels. I currently serve as the Director for the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA). At DCBA we strive to promote a fair and vibrant marketplace while ensuring all individuals have equal access to the marketplace. I appreciate the opportunity to work with your commission.

DCBA was established in 1977 and is one of only five consumer protection agencies of its kind at the local level. DCBA runs a complaint investigations program, a consumer counseling program, a dispute resolution program, and a consumer education and outreach program. Additionally, DCBA established a small business services unit to assist individuals start a business in the County or those looking to contract with the County.

The Consumer Education and Public Outreach Unit provides consumers with information so they are not taken advantage of in the marketplace. Consumer Education and Public Outreach provides 200 presentations throughout the County of Los Angeles every year. These events are held in partnership with elected officials and for various organizations.



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Another program DCBA offers is consumer counseling. We have a call center, in which consumers can contact us with any consumer issue. We also offer mediation services, which includes staff that work to resolve complaints that do not rise to the level of violation of law. Many of these cases are neighbor-to-neighbor, landlord-tenant, or business-to-consumer. Lastly, our small claims court advisors help guide consumers through the small claims process. We assist with forms and provide other free help, but we do not provide legal advice.

Our complaint investigations unit reviews alleged violations of the law. Our team works closely with city and county law enforcement agencies to prosecute cases. For example, we recently partnered with the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office on immigration services fraud. In these cases, individuals claim they can help individuals obtain US citizenship when they really have no power to do so. We have also investigated foreclosure assistance fraud, in which individuals claim they can help a consumer save their home, but actually have no ability to do so.

The Department recently merged with the Office of Small Business after a decision by the Board of Supervisors. This occurred because the Board believed that this merger would allow us to be more proactive in assisting small businesses. This office will continue administering the Small Business Preference Program, which gives an 8% preference to certified small businesses over larger businesses when competing for county bids.

The Department of Consumer and Business Affairs does not currently have any programs that target people with disabilities. However, we do offer services that are accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, we offer online video mediation, which may be advantageous for individuals who may find it difficult to leave their homes. We also help facilitate the Disabled Veterans Business Preference Program through Disability Veterans Preference program.

Response to Refueling Assistance

Following my presentation at the Commission on Disabilities, I directed Department staff to undertake a comprehensive assessment to determine how to become more responsive to the needs of consumers with disabilities. The assessment resulted in 11 recommendations, which we are in the process of implementing and reporting back to your commission on our progress.

Prompted by the Commission's suggestion at the June 17th meeting, the disability assessment included meeting with different Independent Living Centers (ILRCs) in Los Angeles County. These interviews were held with the Southern California Resource Center for Independent Living (SCRS-IL) in Alhambra, the Independent Living Center of Southern California (ILCSC) in Van Nuys, and the Westside Center for Independent Living (WCIL) in Mar Vista. We talked about a variety of issues, including housing and transportation challenges.

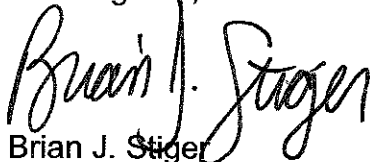
We specifically inquired about the refueling assistance issue. ILRC members stated that they were refused assistance. One individual stated that he is frequently mistaken for someone asking for money rather than a consumer asking for assistance to pump gas. Another consumer said she feels more comfortable asking other customers at the station for assistance over attendants. These conversations suggest that there is a general lack of awareness of the law and insufficient knowledge about who is considered disabled.

We also conducted a scan to see if there were any recent developments on this issue locally or across the country. A 2012 USA Today article covered a Florida disability activist who was advocating for a county measure that would require gas stations to set and publish specific times when attendants will be available to assist disabled drivers. Another notable development is SB 1186, a 2013 California law that added \$1 to local business licenses and renewals to fund certified access specialists to help gas stations meet refueling assistance rules, such as changing distance of pumps from the ground or installing call buttons at pumps.

I have directed my public policy and outreach teams to address this problem. We are currently determining the feasibility of sending a mailer to all gas stations in the unincorporated areas to inform owners of their obligations under the law as it relates to this issue. In addition, we are partnering with Independent Living Resource Centers in Los Angeles County to provide educational presentations to the disabled community in order to inform them of their rights. Refueling assistance will be included in these presentations. Also, we will disseminate information about refueling rules as well as the rights of disabled consumers requesting refueling assistance through our social media platforms as well as factsheets that we make available to consumers in our office.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this information. I appreciate the work you do for the County of Los Angeles and I look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brian J. Stiger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Brian" is written with a large, prominent "B". The last name "Stiger" is written with a large, prominent "S". The initials "J." are written between the first and last names.

Brian J. Stiger
Director